

## [George Horton]

James Larkin Pearson,

Boomer, N. C.

THE LIFE STORY OF GEORGE [ HORTON, COLORED.

This story is not entirely factual. It is partly on fact, but a considerable portion of it is drawn from imagination. The black mother and the mulatto son did in fact exist, though they are now dead; but the son did not drown himself as the present story has it. There was something of the boy's problem—his mental and spiritual struggle against fate—but it has been heightened and played up for dramatic effect.

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This is the story of George Horton, Negro. It is not so much an account of his physical battles with life, but rather the story of his mental reactions and [sufferings?] as he faced the unanswerable question—the hopeless biological and psychological problem—of being a Negro.

George Horton's mother was a full-blooded Negro woman of the old, uneducated, servant type. Her name was Liz. She was black, simple-minded, and humble. She came along a generation later than slavery days, but she was more or less a reversion to the old slave type. She was a good servant, and to be a good servant was all that she knew.

There was something called morals that white people talked about but did not always practice. Liz had only a faint notion of the meaning of the word morals. May be it was something that Negro servants were not supposed to have. There were certain physical appetites which called for gratification, and Liz saw no particular reason for self-denial.

The educated white gentlemen who hired Negro women for servants did not always practice in their private lives the high morality which they preached in public. So it came to pass that Liz was the mother of a son, and the son was only half black. The educated white gentleman who was his father was never compelled to face the issue and acknowledge the mulatto son. Perhaps he could not know for certain that the son was his. And perhaps Liz was not certain, either. Among several educated white gentlemen with adjustable morals, why pick on one? And so the matter rested.

But the son's problems were not so easily settled. As George Horton grew up there were unmistakable signs of his white blood. His complexion was light and his features were far less negroid than those of his mother. He was a rather good looking yellow boy, and among his black playmates he was utterly a misfit.

But that in itself wouldn't have been so bad. It was the white man's mind in the yellow boy which constituted the age-old biological tragedy. George Horton, long before he reached manhood, was bitterly aware of the irreparable wrong which had been done to him. There being but little thinking capacity in the black mother, it followed naturally that the unknown white father had contributed nearly all of the boy's mind. The boy therefore thought and felt as a white boy, and his individual reaction to life—his conscious sense of personal being—was essentially white.

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But this white personality—this superior mind—was forever imprisoned in a body which was half black and which could never escape from the stigma of being a Negro's body. George Horton hated his unknown white father for placing that brand of shame upon him,

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even as he pitied himself for being the half-breed son of his ignorant black mother. From the mother's point of view (if she had reasoned about it at all) it would have been a matter of pride that she was giving her child a white father and the blood of a superior race. She could never have understood why her son was not proud of it, too. She could not know that his conscious "center of gravity", so to speak, would be far over on the white side of the dividing line, while hers was on the black side. From her viewpoint the boy's yellow skin was a step upward, a thing to be proud of. But from his viewpoint it was a badge of shame and humiliation.

George Horton was 20 and had graduated from the high school of the colored race. His schoolmates and companions had been black and brown and yellow. For the blacks he had a condescending pity and contempt. They were inferior creatures and utterly beneath him. For the browns and yellows he had a feeling of sympathy and some sort of half-understanding. They were in a like predicament with himself. They were the innocent and helpless victims of the sins of the fathers. These sins could not be laid at the door of the mothers to the same extent. The mothers were black and ignorant and dominated by their physical passion. They did not know any better. But the white fathers who knowingly and deliberately [doomed?] their innocent offspring to the hopeless fate of mongrel outcasts—such fathers should be denounced and condemned and forever disowned with all the bitter invective that the language knows.

And so the bitter hate of George Horton was directed against his cruel father whose identity he never knew. The bitter years dragged on, and the yellow boy fought his desperate and hopeless battle against the invincible forces of fate and destiny.

"Why", he asked bitterly, "should this thing have happened to me? If I had to be a Negro, why wasn't I allowed to/ be a whole Negro? Then I would not have had this sense of being divided against myself—this feeling of mental and spiritual warfare with my own flesh and blood. I have no choice but to hate my father, my mother, and myself. I hate everything that has entered into making me what I am. And I hate the society which compels me to

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go on suffering for two sins of others. Here I am, a mongrel misfit in a world that disowns me on every side. I am without race or family. I am without pride of ancestry or hope of honorable posterity. If I marry some other unfortunate like myself and become the father of a family, I will only be transmitting 5 to others the curse that is upon me. I will be perpetuating to the [end?] of time a lost and hopeless race of half-breeds that never can hope to be anything else. If I started such a line of half-breed posterity it would not only perpetuate itself to the end of time, but it would spread out like a fan and increase in numbers with each generation. Thus my father's sin and mine would be visited upon helpless millions who could have no choice in the matter. Before I would start such an endless chain of heartache and suffering I would cut my own miserable throat or send a bullet crashing through my unprofitable brain. What must I do with my white man's mind that is doomed to live in this yellow body? Must I educate it and train it to think and feel yet more keenly the hopeless pain of the curse? Or should I renounce and deny the unwelcome gifts of intellect which have come to me through the unknown father that I hate?"

George Horton's countenance as he spoke was shadowed with dark and bitter and universal hate, and his face was set to a grim pattern of endless and inevitable sorrow that would never in time or eternity be lighted up with one fleeting glimpse of hope. It was as if all the combined and terrible and nameless dooms of numberless eternities had fallen with cataclysmic thunders upon the bowed and bloody head of one lonesome and God-forgotten mulatto boy.

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But like the fabled Wandering Jew who bore all the sins and curses of his deathless race in his own doomed-to-life body, George Horton went staggering on blindly and desperately through the beginningless and endless dark days of his lonesome age-old youth, and the dumb cry of his voiceless agony was lost in the loud grinding of the heavy wheels of fate.

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The other brown and yellow people of his mixed race—who came into life as he did—were not burdened and troubled with the old unanswerable questions of race and blood and spiritual frustration. These yellow people that he knew and associated with seemed to take it all as a matter of course and did not worry about it. He alone of all his mulatto race had inherited something terrible , and tragic , and soul-splitting and eternally unbearable.

One gloomy day in winter they dragged the dark deep river and took from it the limp and lifeless yellow body of a young man who could not find his place anywhere in this world. His black mother was there to weep and wring her black hands. But the educated white gentleman who was his father—ah, who knows?